



# COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for Employment Services Providers

If you have any questions or issues that you want to raise in regard to COVID-19 impact on employment services provision, please send them to your Account Manager via Question Manager. Headings and questions highlighted in blue have been updated since the last version of this FAQ.

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# 1. Information on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Where do I source the most up-to-date advice on COVID-19?

The latest information on COVID-19 can be found at [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au) and on the Department of Health website at <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

This site has wide ranging information that includes:

- Current status
- How to protect yourself and others
  - What you can do
  - Symptoms of COVID-19
  - When to get tested
- If you're concerned
  - GP respiratory clinics
- Additional advice
  - Travellers
  - Health and aged care sector

Each state or territory Health Department may issue additional advice. You can contact your state or territory public health agency through the following channels:

- ACT visit [www.health.act.gov.au](http://www.health.act.gov.au)
- NSW visit [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)
- NT visit [www.health.nt.gov.au](http://www.health.nt.gov.au)
- QLD visit [www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au)
- SA visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)
- TAS visit [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au)
- VIC visit [www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)
- WA visit [www.healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au)

For state specific Work Health and Safety guidance and requirements please visit [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)

You can contact the 24/7 National Coronavirus Health Information Line on **1800 020 080** which provides health and situation information on the outbreak.

If you need help with translation services while seeking help, you can contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450 or [www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

## 2. Employment Services

### Are employment services classified as ‘Essential Services’?

Employment services Providers should contact their relevant state or territory government for information on whether employment services are classified as ‘Essential Services’.

### Should Employment Services Providers have appointments with job seekers?

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the Department) considers that, with signs of economic recovery, businesses hiring staff and COVID-19 restrictions continuing to ease across

Australia, it is appropriate to commence the return to usual (pre-COVID) servicing arrangements for job seekers.

Accordingly, the Department directs that, with effect from **9 March 2021**, Participant opt-in requirements cease and Providers **must** deliver Services face-to-face where this is required by the Deed and consistent with relevant health advice.

This new direction cancels the direction issued on 18 September 2020, which had permitted Providers to deliver Services, including all Activities (including Work for the Dole) face-to-face, provided that several conditions were met, including that Participants must opt-in to participate in the Services face-to-face.

Subject to the below conditions and qualifications, the Department now directs that:

- (a) the Provider must ensure that face-to-face delivery is carried out in a safe manner and is appropriate for the relevant Participant, the Provider's staff and others from a work health and safety perspective. In this regard, the Provider must:
  - (i) consult guidance and information published by Safe Work Australia and the relevant work health and safety regulator;
  - (ii) have a COVID-Safe plan, in accordance with the requirements specified by the relevant State and Territory government, in place for each of the Sites where face-to-face delivery will be provided;
  - (iii) ensure that face-to-face Services are delivered in accordance with the Provider's relevant COVID-Safe plan;
  - (iv) ensure that each relevant Activity Host Organisation or Host Organisation has a COVID-Safe plan (or similar), in accordance with the requirements specified by the relevant State and Territory government, in place for each Activity which involves face-to-face participation prior to the Provider placing a Participant into that Activity; and
  - (v) continue to deliver non face-to-face servicing for participants who are unable to meet the minimum COVID-Safe requirements set by each State or Territory Government.
- (b) where face-to-face delivery is **partially restricted by the requirements of a relevant State or Territory government**, Providers must provide face-to-face servicing up to the limit of the relevant restriction until the restriction is revoked, and provide services remotely by phone, video or online where face-to-face services cannot otherwise be delivered.
- (c) where face-to-face delivery is **entirely prevented by the requirements of a relevant State or Territory government**, non- face-to-face services may be delivered until the relevant requirement is revoked, and for four weeks after the revocation date for non-face-to-face activities booked during the restriction period.
- (d) to the extent that face-to-face service delivery is restricted or prevented by the requirements of a relevant State or Territory government, the Department:
  - (i) waives obligations to deliver Services face-to-face; and
  - (ii) agrees to the Provider using alternative means to deliver the relevant Services, including by phone, video and/or online.
- (e) as part of a transition period, Activities (including courses where relevant) that have been arranged on or before the date of this direction to be delivered in a non face-to-face format,

and scheduled to commence prior to 30 April 2021, may be still be delivered in a non face-to-face format. Where a currently scheduled Activity is to commence after 30 April 2021, Providers must conduct these activities face-to-face and advise participants accordingly.

- (f) If face-to-face delivery is impacted in the future by local events such as natural disasters or the requirements of Commonwealth, State or Territory governments or local authorities, the Provider may to seek agreement from the Department to alter service delivery arrangements for the period of the relevant local event.

## **In what circumstances would a job seeker not be able to comply?**

This will vary depending on local requirements at the time and how these may impact on individual job seekers.

Examples of issues that may impact on individuals could include job seekers who are:

- immune suppressed; or
- be asked to self-isolate based on a local or individual direction; or
- may be exempted from wearing a face mask when they are mandatory for the location of the mutual obligation activity.

Broader health directions that limit movement and activities are also applicable.

## **What happens if a Provider's site is locked down however the job seeker resides outside the restriction area?**

If practical, and taking into account whether it is reasonable for the job seeker to travel to a different site, the job seeker should be referred to another site otherwise non face-to-face servicing would apply for the period of the restriction.

## **Are COVID-19 issues covered by Special Circumstances Exemptions?**

Broader health directions are not covered under the current definitions however in certain cases a Temporary Medical exemption could be considered.

Further advice on the application of this direction in relation to specific programs is available on the Provider Portal.

For more information on your local COVID-19 advice, safe practices and workplace principles, please refer to [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au), [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au), and your relevant State or Territory health authority information.

Links to enforceable government health and emergency directions and COVID Safe plans are at: [safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/other-resources/covid-19-public-health-directions-and-covidsafe](http://safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/other-resources/covid-19-public-health-directions-and-covidsafe).

## **How do we deliver Initial Interviews, sight Proof of Identity documents, and complete Privacy Consent Forms?**

From 9 March 2021, Initial Interviews must be delivered face-to-face as required by the Deed, unless restricted by the requirements of a relevant State or Territory Government where they can be held via phone, video or online options, including Skype videoconferencing. As such, Initial Interviews, sight Proof of Identity documents, and complete Privacy Consent Forms can be completed at

Provider premises. Please refer to the Directions on the Return to Face-to-Face Service Delivery document published on the [Provider Portal](#).

Where conducted, face-to-face Initial Interviews must comply with the Eligibility, Referral and Commencement guideline available on the [Provider Portal](#).

## **Initial Interviews where relevant State or Government requirements restrict face-to face delivery**

The job seeker may provide Proof of Identity (POI) details, such as ID numbers, via phone to the Provider. The Provider could then confirm the information based on Centrelink's records in the system (from the registration screen in ESSWeb) and in line with the Direct Registration Guideline and Form. POIs could also be confirmed by phone/MMS, email, or by post. Employment Services Providers can process Privacy Consent Forms via phone or online.

Providers should:

- During the Initial Interview, read out the privacy statement/notification (Part A of the Privacy Notification and Consent form) over the phone or online, and provide it to the job seeker/participant online or via email.
- If the Initial Interview is being held online or via a telephone call and the job seeker/participant has access to emails, send the Privacy Notification and Consent form to the job seeker and seek their consent to the collection of their sensitive information. Obtain consent from the job seeker/participant via email, where possible.
- If the Initial Interview is being held via a telephone call and the job seeker/participant does not have access to emails, read out Part B of the Privacy Notification and Consent Form and seek the job seeker/participant's consent to the collection of their sensitive information verbally. If consent is received verbally, the Department suggests Providers immediately make a file note of the consent provided by the job seeker/participant, including the circumstances surrounding why the manual signature could not be obtained (e.g. COVID-19 health crisis). Where possible, the Department also recommends Providers email the job seeker/participants' nominated person or sends a text/SMS message acknowledging that consent was provided verbally.
- Ensure that Part B of the Privacy Notification and Consent form is subsequently signed by the relevant job seekers/participants when the Department advises that job seekers are able to attend the Provider's premises.
- Identity may be confirmed via phone or video conference based on the information recorded in the registration screen by Services Australia. Providers are to add a comment in the system that the Initial Interview was done via phone or video conference.

For further information, please see the Directions on the Return to Face-to-Face Service Delivery document published on the [Provider Portal](#).

## **Do existing participant eligibility requirements for Direct Registration apply?**

Yes. Direct Registration guidance remains unchanged, noting the Directions on the Return to Face-to-Face Service Delivery document published on the Provider Portal.

## **Do we have to check ID electronically or via post, or can we confirm identification through the ESSWeb registration screen?**

The job seeker may provide Proof of Identity (POI) details via phone or video conference, such as ID numbers. The Provider could then confirm the information based on Services Australia's record in the system (from the registration screen in ESSWeb).

## **Do you have to sight the Participant's ID or can you just verify the details by asking the participant their full name, date of birth, CRN, email and phone number?**

Identity may be confirmed via phone or video conference by confirming the information based on what Services Australia has recorded in the system (from the registration screen in ESSWeb).

Providers are to add a comment in the system that the Initial Interview was done via phone or video conference.

## **Are electronic signatures acceptable on documentary evidence?**

The Department allows digital signatures on a number of program and policy related documents. For example:

- Providers can process Privacy Consent Forms via phone or online where consent can be sought by email or verbally, which must be documented on the job seeker's record.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Providers are allowed to conduct the JSCI or Change of Circumstance Reassessments (CoCR) via phone which means that physical signatures are not required.

For some documents there are arrangements in place for non-physical agreement to take place:

- Job seekers can agree to their Job Plans through their jobactive account, by email or verbally, whereby the Provider must document the agreement on the job seeker's record.
- Providers can send Internship Agreements through the jobactive.gov.au website for job seekers and employers to sign electronically.

The use of electronic signatures for a particular program should be decided on a case-by-case basis as each form requiring signature may have different execution requirements. Where electronic signature is allowed, Providers do not need to seek the Department's approval on the type of electronic signature used (e.g. PDF Fill & Sign).

The continuation of alternative execution arrangements post-COVID-19 are being reviewed by the Department.

## **How will Provider performance be monitored/reviewed in light of COVID-19?**

The Government has announced a strengthened focus on provider performance from early April 2021, in support of assisting as many job seekers into emerging job opportunities as possible, as the economy recovers and employers start to re-hire staff.

A contractual notice will be issued shortly, advising all jobactive Providers that performance will be monitored and assessed against critical contractual obligations in delivering services to employers and job seekers.

These will likely include target areas such as prompt commencement of new job seekers in services, and referrals to activities to improve job seeker's employability (such as training). They will also focus on proactive follow up of job interview attendance and job search quality.

Further details of the requirements, assessment and monitoring against the targets will be outlined in relevant guidelines, to be issued to Providers prior to the commencement of the measure.

The Department intends to use existing remedies under the jobactive deed where a Provider does not perform to the required standards, having first been given an opportunity to improve their performance.

While the Star Ratings are currently suspended, the regular six-monthly Performance Period reporting by the Department in regard to Provider performance will continue, with the format and content of the assessments taking into account the effects of COVID-19. The Department will continue to work with all Providers to get the best quality of service and outcomes for job seekers.

### **Can Employment Service Providers assist Centrelink by searching CRNs in ESS for job seekers that cannot locate their CRN if they have not used if for some time?**

If a job seeker requests a CRN from an employment services Provider, subject to establishing proof of identity, personal information could be released to them.

More information is available on [www.servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au)

### **Many Providers use third party IT systems, and it was mentioned that agreement by job seekers could be recorded in ESSWeb. Would the Department allow these notes to be recorded in the third party IT?**

The Department is aware some Providers use third party IT systems and can continue to do so in line with their Deed. It is important to remember that contact details and actions taken by job seekers to meet mutual obligations are recorded in ESSWeb to ensure the required updates with Services Australia are managed. There are important business processes within ESSWeb that may be missed if data is not recorded.

Please refer to the [Learning Centre](#) in Resources, Provider Accreditation for details of how these systems are to be incorporated into your Right Fit For Risk accreditation.

## **3. Mutual Obligations, Job Plans, and Initial Interviews**

### **What Mutual Obligations are currently in effect (and on the horizon)?**

Mutual obligation requirements resumed nationwide from 28 September 2020 (23 November 2020 in Victoria), including the resumption of payment suspensions and penalties under the Targeted Compliance Framework (TCF).

The reintroduction of mutual obligation requirements and the TCF applies to:

- jobactive – including job seekers in Online Employment Services and New Employment Services Trial

- Disability Employment Services, and
- ParentsNext.

Job seekers with Providers are generally required to:

- participate in appointments with their Provider
- negotiate and agree to a Job Plan
- undertake a minimum of eight job searches per month
  - a minimum of 15 job searches from early April 2021, increasing to 20 from 1 July 2021
- participate in appropriate activities
  - including a new activity requirement for job seekers who have been participating in jobactive or OES for six months, from October 2021
- accept offers of suitable work.

Additionally, jobactive job seekers in the Work for the Dole phase must meet their Annual Activity Requirement (AAR) by participating in a set number of hours of approved activities.

Where there are no suitable activities available, Providers can credit the job seeker the hours until such a time when suitable activities are available – refer to this [Task Card on the Learning Centre](#) for assistance.

Providers must be flexible when setting requirements and ensure all job seekers' Job Plans reflect their individual personal circumstances, and local labour market conditions. Noting that there are currently many job seekers with little or no knowledge of how the system works or what is required of them, Providers must carefully consider what is a reasonable excuse for not meeting requirements and to take every opportunity to explain to job seekers their obligations, and the assistance and supports available to them.

Exemptions continue to be available through Services Australia for job seekers who require them – including those directly impacted by COVID-19.

Sole traders and other self-employed income support recipients continue to be exempt from requirements to allow them to work to re-establish their business.

Job seekers whose wages are paid via JobKeeper Payment must meet mutual obligation requirements, unless they are exempt for another reason.

## **How will the job seeker Activity Requirement after six months in service be implemented?**

The intensive activity will last for up to 25 hour per week for up to eight weeks (subject to the individual's circumstances and assessed work capacity). Job seekers will be able to undertake a range of activities, such as short training courses, volunteer work or Work for the Dole. The Department is currently working through the operational policy detail and build requirements and will share more information with providers shortly.

## Does a job seekers current status determine their eligibility or does the timeline commence after their support in Online Employment Services, meaning these job seekers will be referred to providers in September/October?

A job seeker's eligibility for the six-month activity is determined by their period of service on or after 1 October 2021.

The timeframe for commencement in the six-month intensive activity for job seekers is determined by their commencement date in employment services regardless of whether the job seeker is serviced in Online Employment Services or by a Provider.

Participation in the six-month activity applies to participants in Online Employment Services (OES) and job seekers serviced by a provider. Available activities include short training courses, volunteer work or Work for the Dole activities. Online job seekers who have completed the six-month activity prior to being referred to a provider will need to meet an AAR requirement on or after 12 months in service.

## Does the six-month activity count towards a job seeker's AAR?

No. AAR commences for a job seeker from 12 months in service.

## What flexibilities are available for Providers when scheduling appointments and creating/updating Job Plans?

From 9 March 2021, Providers must return to the usual (pre-COVID-19) face-to-face servicing arrangements, where it is safe to do so, subject to local health advice.

### ***Initial Interviews for new referrals***

Providers must return to delivering Initial Interviews face-to-face where local health advice and job seekers' circumstances allow.

When negotiating Job Plans at Initial Interviews, job seekers continue to have the option to agree to a Job Plan through their jobactive account, by email or verbally, whereby the Provider must document the agreement on the job seeker's record. Job seekers continue to have the two days' 'think time' option before agreeing to a Job Plan and commencing in service.

### ***Appointments and Job Plans for commenced job seekers***

While face-to-face is the primary service delivery method for commenced job seekers, Providers retain the flexibility to conduct contact appointments over the phone, online or videoconference as appropriate. The Department expects Providers to focus on facilitating face-to-face appointments for commenced job seekers who are disengaged from their Provider or the labour market, or who have identified barriers to finding employment.

At the next available opportunity and as part of business as usual operations, the Department expects Providers to actively engage and discuss the increase to the minimum job search requirement as part of job seekers' regular Provider appointments.

Providers must review the current Job Plan and Mutual Obligation Requirements at the next available appointment. Following the review, the Provider must make an assessment with the job seeker on the most appropriate job search requirement, taking into consideration the individual's personal circumstances, work capacity and local labour market conditions, to ensure that the requirements being set are both appropriate to their situation and achievable.

## **When will information about the changes announced on 23 February 2021 be available?**

From early April 2021, most job seekers will be required to search for a minimum of 15 jobs a month, increasing to 20 job searches a month from 1 July 2021. The Government will also strengthen auditing processes to identify those who are submitting non-genuine or deliberately poor-quality job applications in order to meet job search targets.

From April 2021, a reporting line will be established for employers to inform Government, should people with mutual obligation requirements decline the offer of a job.

The Employer Reporting Line also provides an opportunity to more proactively assist employers to find appropriate staff and to link employers with jobactive Providers in their communities to assist them with their recruitment needs.

This will include linking employers with jobactive Providers, or Departmental support such as Employment Facilitators in their communities.

From October 2021, job seekers who have been unemployed for at least six months will be required to participate in an activity, such as a short training course or Work for the Dole, in addition to their job search activities. This new requirement recognises the benefits of an activity earlier in the job seeker's period of assistance to help them attain the skills and work-like experience critical to securing a job.

The Department will provide more detail on these changes in due course. In the interim, please refer to [Changes to mutual obligation and face-to-face servicing requirements](#) notice on the Provider Portal.

## **Why are mutual obligations being strengthened while COVID-19 is still relevant?**

As we transition back to normal servicing, including the re-introduction of face-to-face servicing as the default servicing arrangement, the strengthening of mutual obligations is designed to place a focus on job seekers actively working towards employment outcomes. While attention is being placed on mutual obligations, the Department emphasises that meeting these should always be conducted in a COVID-Safe manner or that alternative servicing methods are sought where this is not practical. Initial information in regard to mutual obligation requirements and other changes have been provided above. Further detail will be provided by the Department soon, including by way of guideline updates.

## **What is Flexible learning?**

The Government is increasing opportunities for job seeker training and providing additional flexibility for job seekers to count education and training towards their mutual obligation

requirements. Job seekers are encouraged to undertake courses that are under 12 months in duration and provide skills that are in demand.

Providers should:

- encourage job seekers to build on their existing skill sets and help them to access skills and training opportunities
- become familiar with and promote subsidised and JobTrainer Fund courses in areas of high skills demand
- take the job seeker's study into account when setting the appropriate level of job search for the job seeker
- work with job seekers to consider focussing job search in the field of their study, if it will increase the likelihood of the job seeker finding sustained employment.

Providers can approve courses under 12 months in duration, which are:

- subsidised courses in the Vocational Education and Training system, including additional courses made available through the JobTrainer Fund ([myskills.gov.au/jobtrainer](https://myskills.gov.au/jobtrainer)) or listed on [myskills.gov.au](https://myskills.gov.au) as subsidised by relevant state or territory government
- short courses previously delivered under the Government's Higher Education Relief Package listed on [courseseeker.edu.au](https://courseseeker.edu.au), and
- courses approved by Providers in line with existing provisions where a Provider determines that the course is in an area of skills demand and/or is likely to lead to an employment outcome for the job seeker.

Providers can approve study at any stage of employment servicing. Job seekers are not required to undertake a period of job search before study can be approved. An approved course must be included as a compulsory Activity in the job seeker's Job Plan.

If a Provider approves a course and includes it in the Job Plan, the job seeker must generally still look for work and attend appointments with their Provider as long as it does not conflict with the scheduled time of the course. Providers must tailor job search requirements taking into account the study load being undertaken, and other individual circumstances.

Job seekers who are undertaking approved study, and paid work, for a combined total of at least 70 hours per fortnight, do not have job search requirements.

Enrolment and participation in an approved course can contribute towards, or fully meet, job seekers' AAR depending on the study being undertaken, taking into account existing provisions around study load, contact and non-contact hours.

Job seekers can commence study that is at Certificate I or Certificate II level during the Work for the Dole phase and have that study count for AAR. Previously these courses were only approved if they were commenced prior to the Work for the Dole phase.

Where an approved course is at Certificate I or Certificate II level, Providers can credit job seekers' AAR hours. The Department has published a Task Card on the Learning Centre to ensure Provider staff have access to detailed operational instructions on managing AAR and crediting hours of participation in the IT system where this needs to occur:

[Manual Recording and Adjustment of Annual Activity Requirement \(AAR\) Hours in ESSWeb](#)

## **What changes have been made to job seeker payment suspensions and engagement requirements?**

From 28 September 2020, job seekers/participants with a valid reason are no longer required to meet a re-engagement requirement to have their income support payment restored.

This is the case for all job seekers/participants in jobactive, ParentsNext and Disability Employment Services. This also applies to all requirements. Adjustments have been made in ESSWeb to support this change. From 28 September, when you record in ESSWeb that you accept a job seeker's/participant's valid reason, the system will automatically lift the job seeker's/participant's payment—you won't have the option of setting a re-engagement requirement.

If the job seeker/participant has a valid reason but still needs to meet that requirement (e.g. if they didn't sign their Job Plan), you should set the same requirement for them to meet as early as practicable.

The Department has updated the task cards to reflect the new process. Also see the Valid Reason Webinar recording on the Learning Centre page.

From 7 December 2020, payment suspensions are no longer immediate when a job seeker fails to meet a requirement. Job seekers and participants in the Green and Warning Zones now have two business days "Resolution Time" to contact their Provider to discuss and, if required, address the failure to avoid having their payment put on hold. This complements the change to re-engagement requirements.

## **We have opened up lots of initial time slots in our diaries, but have not seen anyone book Participants in.**

The process of job seekers being referred from the Online Employment Service (OES) rather than Services Australia continues. The routine batch referrals from OES to Providers will appear in ESS Web on the Pending Caseload. The receiving Provider will then be responsible for booking an Initial Interview.

Where the Digital Services Contact Centre manually transfers an OES job seeker to a Provider (eg. an opt-out) the Initial Interview is booked in the diary.

## **What are the New Job Seeker Referral Arrangements?**

Updated IT arrangements have been introduced to automatically refer job seekers to Providers from the Online Employment Service.

## **What messaging does the Department send job seekers about their requirements?**

The Department advises job seekers and participants when mutual obligation requirements change. If there are any major changes to mutual obligation requirements, the Department sends out SMS/email/inbox messages to job seekers advising them of their mutual obligations requirements.

Messaging has, and will continue to be sent to job seekers directly and through the Department's social media account.

## Can Job Plans be updated in cases where the job seeker has a pending Capability Interview (CI)?

No, a job seeker/participant's Job Plan is locked while they have a pending CI.

## What adjustments is the Department making for job seekers who are unable to meet their total required AAR hours due to the impact of COVID-19? Do we still need to manually record any AAR hours in ESS?

From 28 September 2020, for jobactive job seekers Annual Activity Requirements returned – including the Work for the Dole program. However, there continues to be flexibility for Providers and job seekers when arranging and sourcing activities.

Adjustments to the two Star Rating measures attached to the Work for the Dole Phase - that is:

- time to commence in Work for the Dole/activity; and
- Work for the Dole phase participation

will continue to be applied until further notice. These adjustments are the exclusion of participants who entered the phase after 13 March 2020 and the pro-rata of AAR hours for those who were already in the phase on 13 March 2020.

This arrangement acknowledges both the work and timeframes required of Providers to safely re-establish and expand suitable Activities for job seekers to participate in. The Department will give Providers advance notice on when these two measures will be re-introduced.

In addition, where suitable activities are not available at the time a job seeker commences the Work for the Dole phase, then a Provider is able to manually credit the job seeker the hours until such a time as suitable activities are available. For detailed step-by-step assistance on how to use the Monthly Hours Panel in ESSWeb to credit hours please refer to this [Task Card](#) on the Learning Centre.

Notwithstanding these flexibilities in the IT system, as well as the ongoing COVID-19 related adjustments to the two WfD phase performance measures in the Star Rating calculations, the Department expects Providers to continue using best endeavours to access sufficient suitable and safe activities to meet the AAR and promptly place job seekers into those activities as soon as they become available. The Department will be undertaking targeted desktop monitoring and review of Provider performance in respect of: placing job seekers in approved activities in a timely manner; and the proportion of job seekers in the WfD phase on track to meet their AAR.

## What are the changes to Job Search requirements?

The labour market continues to recover from the economic challenges of COVID-19 and job seekers are again required to do all that they can to find a job and support themselves through paid work.

Commencing in early April 2021, job seekers in jobactive, DES and Online Employment Services will be required to search for 15 jobs a month.

From 1 July 2021 the minimum job search requirement for job seekers in jobactive, DES and Online Employment Services will return to the pre-COVID-19 requirement of 20 job searches per month.

To ensure job seekers are doing all that they are able to find work, the Government will also strengthen auditing processes, and establish a reporting line for employers to report job seekers not genuinely looking for work. While most job seekers are doing the right thing and trying to find employment, these initiatives will identify those submitting non-genuine or deliberately poor-quality job applications in order to meet job search targets, or turning down work.

### **If a job seeker has a training course in their job plan, but doesn't turn up (because of COVID-19), are we able to claim the cost, as was the case during bushfires?**

The Department is looking to monitor and be flexible in these scenarios, and will provide further advice as things unfold.

### **Will there be a fix to allow an Initial Interview to be scheduled for 15 minutes**

Yes – Initial interviews can be scheduled for 15 minutes.

### **Can you confirm if Centrelink will be referring all newly registered job seekers to Employment Services Providers (e.g. jobactive, TTW)?**

Centrelink is currently referring the majority of newly registered job seekers to the Department's Online Employment Services. Job seekers are then referred to Providers to ensure that people who will benefit most from Providers' assistance can access services.

### **Are participants who have lost their job considered retrenched workers, even if they are not eligible for JobKeeper or JobSeeker Payments?**

People who have been retrenched in the last six months (or nine months for Stronger Transitions) or who have received notification from their employer in the three months prior to their retrenchment date, and their partners, are eligible for immediate access to jobactive Services. To access employment services as a retrenched worker, job seekers must provide a letter of retrenchment, which includes their date of retrenchment and their retrenching employer.

Note: The Stronger Transition program was closed to new entrants from 1 July 2020.

## **4. Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) and Employment Services Assessments (ESAt)**

### **What do Providers do if a Participant is referred for Commencement in jobactive or the NEST with no JSCI or with an 'inactive' JSCI?**

Providers should, first and foremost, ask the Participant to complete the Job Seeker Snapshot. If the Participant cannot do so, Providers should conduct the JSCI. The newly conducted JSCI will have an 'active' status.

If, after the JSCI has been completed, a jobactive Provider considers a newly referred young person may be eligible for Transition to Work (TtW) services, please check the Eligibility screen in ESSWeb to determine if they are eligible for TtW. If eligible please refer the young person to TtW via the IT system and/or discuss with your Account or Contract Manager.

### **Are there Documentary Evidence requirements if a Provider conducts the initial JSCI for a Participant?**

Providers should ask the participant to confirm verbally that the recorded responses are correct and then record the following statement in the "Comments" section in ESSWeb:

"The Participant verbally confirms that the JSCI responses recorded accurately reflect their circumstances."

### **What is the impact of the COVID-19 Servicing Arrangements on the ability for Providers to do JSCIs for Participants?**

All participants in jobactive and the NEST have access to the online Job Seeker Snapshot and can complete their own initial JSCI or Change of Circumstances Reassessment (CoCR). In circumstances where the Participant cannot complete their own CoCR, Providers can conduct the CoCR at any time. The previous six-month service limitation has been removed. Participants in jobactive should not be referred to Services Australia for a CoCR.

### **How do Providers meet Documentary Evidence requirements for jobactive Stream A Participants if the CoCR is conducted via phone?**

For jobactive Stream A Participants, if the CoCR is conducted via phone, the following Documentary Evidence requirements apply:

- Providers should explain the nature and context of the changes recorded in the designated textbox as per the Assessments Guideline.
- Instead of asking the Participant to initial, sign and date the CoCR Summary, the Provider should ask the Participant to confirm verbally that the recorded responses are correct and then record the following statement in the "Comments" section in ESSWeb:

“The Participant verbally confirms that the JSCI responses recorded accurately reflect their circumstances.”

## What do Providers do with Participants that have a pending JSCI at time of referral?

From 3 April 2020, IT system changes were implemented to stop JSCIs created by participants using the Job Seeker Snapshot (online JSCI) moving into a status of ‘pending’. In addition, arrangements have been put in place to ensure that an ESAt is completed or the ESAt trigger is withdrawn before a Participant is referred to the Provider. However, if a Participant is referred to a Provider and the JSCI has a status of ‘pending’, Providers should consider whether an ESAt is appropriate.

If it is considered that an ESAt is appropriate, Providers should first check the Participant’s calendar to determine whether an ESAt appointment has been booked, and if so, remind the Participant that they will need to attend the appointment. If there is no appointment booked, Providers should contact the FOCUS Team for assistance with booking an appointment or, book an appointment directly if the job seeker is within the cohorts that allow the Provider to take this action.

Please note the new FOCUS Team process below:

1) The Provider emails FOCUS.RESPONSE.TEAM@servicesaustralia.gov.au mailbox to request an ESAt appointment.

2) Services Australia determines if an ESAt is still required.

3) Services Australia contacts the Participant to see if an ESAt can be completed straight away, and:

→ if so, the ESAt is completed.

→ If not: the Participant will be booked into an ESAt appointment by Services Australia, using the Online Diary. The appointment notification and messaging will be triggered automatically.

If it is considered that an ESAt is not required, Providers should contact the Employment Systems Service Desk to action the ESAt trigger and set the JSCI status to ‘active’ as per usual processing arrangements.

## Can medical evidence be provided verbally during COVID-19 for a JSCI?

Consistent with the Assessments Guideline, physical evidence is not mandatory for the JSCI. However, physical evidence is mandatory for ESAts.

## Can Providers see the Job Seeker Snapshot?

The Job Seeker Snapshot is the online version of the JSCI. A Provider can view a Participant’s JSCI using the JSCI page in ESS Web. To support Providers deliver remote services to participants, the Department has developed a short video guide to help Providers walk participants through the Job Seeker Snapshot. The video can be accessed via the link below:

<https://learningcentre.employment.gov.au/course/view.php?id=2476>

The Department has also prepared a user guide for participants in the Online Employment Services on how to complete the Job Seeker Snapshot and Job Plan online. The user guide may be useful for Providers' reference and can be accessed via the link below:

[https://jobsearch.gov.au/content/documents/OES\\_JobSeekerSnapshot\\_JobPlan\\_UserGuide.pdf](https://jobsearch.gov.au/content/documents/OES_JobSeekerSnapshot_JobPlan_UserGuide.pdf)

## 5. Work for the Dole and Activities

### Can Work for the Dole activities be recommenced?

Yes, Work for the Dole activities may resume where it is suitable and safe to do so in all states and territories. Please refer to the [Work for the Dole – Information about the recommencement – Provider FAQs](#) for detailed information on the recommencement of Work for the Dole activities.

### How should Providers manage participant compliance obligations under the TCF where group activities are no longer possible, however compulsory participation in activities remain for participants?

In some instances, there will be activities that will not be able to continue even in online settings. In these instances, Providers should be able to credit hours of participation for AAR so that job seekers are not disadvantaged.

### What is happening with unpaid placements and other project-based placement initiatives?

Unpaid placements (such as National Work Experience Programme and PaTH Internships) and project initiatives (such as PaTH Industry Pilots, and Launch into Work) involving projects in specific settings, such as aged care and disability services, will continue on a voluntary basis, where Providers have ensured a safe system of work is in place and in line with advice from local Health Authorities. From 1 December 2020, the jobactive payment model returned to arrangements that were in place prior to the commencement of COVID-19, being weighted towards the achievement of Employment Outcomes.

## Employment Fund

For Employment Fund flexibilities please refer to the *Employment Fund and Wage Subsidies flexibilities for COVID-19* Provider Portal News Item of 13 May 2020 - <https://ecsnaccess.gov.au/ProviderPortal/pages/Displaynews.aspx?Newsid=636>

## 6. Wage Subsidy

### Have any changes been made to wage subsidy policy in response to COVID-19?

No, while some temporary flexibilities have been announced in the way Providers can manage existing wage subsidy agreements, there are no changes to ongoing wage subsidy policy.

Employment Services Providers should continue to use their discretion to determine if a wage subsidy is the most appropriate support to secure employment.

Providers can use a range of existing flexibilities under the current wage subsidy guideline to assist employers to retain job seekers, including approved leave.

Please see the Provider Portal for all up to date information and changes to service delivery.

## **Can Providers offer an employer a wage subsidy if they move from the Job Seeker Payment to the JobKeeper Payment?**

There are no changes to wage subsidy policy as a result of the JobKeeper Payment. The JobKeeper Payment has a different purpose to wage subsidies administered through contracted employment services Providers.

In line with the Managing Wage Subsidies Guideline, where an employer has an existing employment relationship with a job seeker, a Provider should not offer a wage subsidy, including if the placement is supported by the JobKeeper Payment.

For information about the JobKeeper Payment, please contact the ATO.

## **What happens if a wage subsidy is attached to a placement and the business closes or the employer cannot provide the average of 20 hours?**

There are existing flexibilities in the Managing Wage Subsidies Guideline that Providers can use to support employers affected by COVID-19, including approved leave and pro rata payments. The Department will also consider waiving specific requirements of the guideline in certain circumstances, further details are available on the Provider Portal.

## **Can the Youth Bonus wage subsidy be 'paused'?**

There is no mechanism to 'pause' a wage subsidy.

Instead, Providers can use existing flexibilities including approved leave and pro-rata payments to support employers, including for Youth Bonus wage subsidies. Please refer to the Provider Portal for additional information.

## **How long can approved leave be for wage subsidies affected by COVID-19?**

There is no specified timeframe for approved leave. Providers should use their judgement to determine which of the flexibilities is the most appropriate support for an employer's specific circumstances as it will affect different employers in different ways.

For example:

- For an employer who is standing down staff for a couple of weeks, approved leave might be appropriate.
- For an employer who expects to close for the remainder of the wage subsidy period, ending the wage subsidy and applying a pro-rata payment may be more appropriate.

We also ask that reasonable and compassionate decisions are made within the guidelines and with appropriate documentation. Please refer to the Provider Portal for additional information.

## 7. jobactive and NEST Outcomes

### How will Outcomes be changed to reflect COVID-19 impacts?

There are a number of changes to jobactive Outcomes. To ensure that you have as much detail as possible on these changes on 27 March 2020, a news item on [‘jobactive Employment and Education Outcomes affected by COVID-19’](#) was published on the Provider Portal. A further news item, [‘COVID-19 - Arrangements for jobactive Employment and Education Outcomes’](#), was published on 20 April 2020. Employment Services Providers should monitor the information published on the Provider Portal for all up to date information and changes to service delivery.

### How will Outcome claims work for JRRR based Outcomes when the Job Seeker Payment is \$1100 per fortnight? Will Outcomes be based on the total 'double' payment, or the base rate of Job Seeker Payment?

Employment Outcomes will be based on the reduction of the basic rate of the JobSeeker Payment only. The Coronavirus Supplement is not subject to the personal income test. Outcome arrangements remain unchanged.

### When is an Employment Outcome payable for participants receiving JobKeeper Payment?

An Outcome may be payable where an Outcome was already tracking for a participant who:

- moves onto the JobKeeper Payment through their previous employer, or
- applies for/receives JobSeeker Payment initially then moves onto the JobKeeper Payment through their previous employer.

Where a jobactive participant is in employment and is not tracking towards an Outcome, the Provider is not eligible for Outcomes based on the participant moving onto JobKeeper Payment.

### How do I claim Employment Outcomes where the participant has received income through the JobKeeper Payment?

Where participants are reporting income they have received under JobKeeper Payment to Services Australia, Employment Outcomes will be available to claim in the usual way through the Department's IT Systems.

However, if a Participant does not declare correctly, or if there are time lags and back-payments with JobKeeper Payments, Providers may lodge a Pay Slip Verified Outcome claim. Providers may also need to lodge a Pay Slip Verified Outcome claim for hours-based Outcomes.

Where Providers lodge a Pay Slip Verified Outcome claim they must upload Documentary Evidence in the form of pay slips, payroll summaries, or a signed and dated written statement or email from the Participant or the employer.

## How do we calculate Outcomes for hours-based participants receiving JobKeeper Payment?

Where a Participant receives JobKeeper Payment, continues to work and reports hours to Services Australia, this may be enough to achieve auto hours-based Outcome. Where an hours-based job seeker receives JobKeeper Payment and is not working or working less than their normal hours (and not enough to achieve an Outcome), the following method should be used when lodging a Pay Slip Verified Outcome claim.

Providers should divide the income the participant has received under the JobKeeper Payment by the Participant's normal hourly rate of payment to determine the hourly equivalent. In situations where the participant's normal hourly rate cannot be determined, the Provider should use the participant's Award rate to calculate hours. Award rates can be identified on the Fair Work website, at the following location: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/awards-and-agreements/awards/find-my-award/>

## If a Participant increases income due to the JobKeeper Payment can Providers re-enter the Job Placement as a Capacity Building Vacancy?

No. Where a Participant has an increase of income associated with the JobKeeper Payment only, Providers are not permitted to enter the position again to claim a Capacity Building Outcome. In order to claim a Capacity Building Outcome there must be a significant increase in income associated with the job seeker increasing their work capacity and moving off income support due to employment.

## Can Providers claim an Employment Outcome for participants who return to the employer they worked for prior to COVID-19?

An Outcome will not be payable where a person loses their job due COVID-19, claims JobSeeker Payment, commences in jobactive and then returns to work for that same employer.

There are two exceptions where an Outcome may be payable:

- The Participant starts a new contract of employment with the previous employer.
- There has been an increase in the Participant's income with their previous employer, compared to before COVID-19, which is now sufficient to achieve a Full Outcome (Capacity Building).

## Will time in online servicing contribute towards the first 13 weeks of jobactive service for a Stream A Participant? (not applicable to NEST)

No. Time spent by participants in Online Employment Services will not count towards jobactive service. Participants will need to be in service with a jobactive Provider for three continuous months before a Job Placement can lead to an Employment Outcome.

Providers can check whether a Stream A job seeker has completed their 13 weeks in jobactive by looking at the Job Seeker Personal Summary screen under the Dashboard menu. The text 'Stream A Outcome Eligible' will display under the Lifecycle heading if the job seeker is eligible to track for an Outcome.

## **Will there be Employment Outcomes payable for Job Placements made within the first three months for Stream A Participants? (not applicable to NEST)**

Employment Outcomes for Stream A Participants will follow current policy rules, which require a Participant to be serviced by a jobactive Provider for three continuous months before a Job Placement can trigger an Employment Outcome.

## **What is the date from which Providers may use the additional Permissible Breaks allowed for COVID-19?**

The additional Permissible Breaks may be used from 1 March 2020.

## **Can you please explain the Permissible Breaks allowed for COVID-19?**

There is a total of six additional Permissible Breaks (12 weeks) available for Employment Outcomes affected by COVID-19, where a participant:

- was in isolation or quarantine and unable to work, and/or
- has lost their job or is working reduced hours, and needs to find a new or supplementary job.

The Provider may use a total of eight Permissible Breaks across the entire Outcome period where impacted by COVID-19 (two existing Permissible Breaks and six additional Permissible Breaks).

## **Will ESSWeb be updated to allow the additional Permissible Breaks?**

ESSWeb functionally has been modified to support these additional Permissible Breaks.

## **Would a Permissible Break be allowed where a Participant does not return to paid work?**

No. Permissible Breaks can only be lodged where a Participant returns to employment following the Permissible Break. A break in employment where the job seeker does not return to work is not accepted as a Permissible Break.

## **If a Participant was in a casual position tracking to a Partial Outcome and lost their job due to COVID-19, can the Provider use a Permissible Break?**

No. Permissible Breaks are available only for use in Full Outcomes.

## **Will the temporary income test arrangements for job seekers apply to Employment Outcomes?**

The temporary changes to income test arrangements for JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (Other) will be in place from 25 September 2020 to 31 March 2021. During this period, JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (Other) recipients will be able to earn \$300 per fortnight without reducing their income support payment. There will also be a single taper rate of 60 cents per dollar applied to job seeker earnings above \$300, which will reduce the amount of income support payment received by the job seeker.

These changes will be applied to the assessment of Employment Outcomes for jobactive and the NEST. The Department's IT system will automatically apply the temporary rates to Employment Outcomes where fortnights in the Outcome Period fall between 25 September 2020 and 31 March 2021. Hours-based Employment Outcomes will not be impacted by the change.

## **What arrangements are in place for Education Outcomes affected by COVID-19? (not applicable to NEST)**

Where a Participant cannot continue their course due to closures of educational institutions, Providers should hold off claiming Education Outcomes until the participant has completed participation or attainment requirements.

If the Participant has completed their requirements but the Provider is unable to obtain Documentary Evidence due to closures, the Provider can upload an email or statement from the Participant indicating that they have completed the course or participation requirements.

## **Can Providers apply a 12 week Permissible Break to Education Outcomes?**

The Department does not currently allow Permissible Breaks for Education Outcomes. There may be sufficient flexibility within the current arrangements in order for Education Outcomes to be achieved, particularly where the Participant is completing their studies online or via distance education. However, in cases where the Participant cannot continue their course due to closures or other COVID-19 related issues, additional flexibility for Providers is under consideration. Further advice will be provided.

## **8. New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS)**

Participants in the New Business Assistance with NEIS program can choose to access the Coronavirus Supplement if they are in receipt of an eligible income support payment. This option is currently available to both existing and new NEIS participants.

From 1 April 2021, NEIS Participants in receipt of JobSeeker Payment will be required to transfer to NEIS Allowance when commencing NEIS Assistance. Existing NEIS Participants receiving income support payments will be progressively transitioned to NEIS Allowance, if eligible, over the coming months. Further advice will be sent directly to NEIS Providers in the near future.

## 9. New Employment Services Trial (NEST)

### Is there anything that I need be aware of as a New Employment Services Trial (NEST) Provider? Will referrals to the NEST continue to operate as they do now?

All new job seekers in the NEST regions will be initially referred to Digital Services and asked to complete the online JSCI. Those who complete the online JSCI and are identified as eligible for Digital Services will remain in digital. All other job seekers (identified as eligible for Enhanced Services) will be referred to Enhanced Services. Job seekers will still be able to opt out of Digital Services at any time. Providers should focus effort on meeting needs of job seekers on their caseload and provide them with the best response to their needs and circumstances.

The Department will continue to adhere to health advice and social distancing requirements, including face-to-face servicing where appropriate and allowable.

From 7 December 2020, all new Digital Participants in the NEST regions will automatically commence in the Points Based Activation System (PBAS). Participants can choose to opt out of PBAS at any point in time. Digital Participants or Enhanced Services Participants who are already commenced will be able to opt in to PBAS by calling the Digital Services Contact Centre or discussing PBAS with their Enhanced Services Provider. PBAS allows Participants to meet their Mutual Obligation Requirements by undertaking and reporting tasks to meet a specified Points Target each Points Reporting Period. Participants can meet their Points Target by undertaking activities or a range of Job Search Related Tasks such as job applications, job interviews and paid work.

From 16 November 2020, digital participants who commence their fourth month in NEST digital (Digital First and Digital Plus), and are not already declaring their work or study, must undertake an activity requirement. The four month activity requirement is designed to help prepare digital participants for future employment opportunities by enhancing their job search, interview and employability skills. Digital participants will have a choice of what eligible activity they would like to complete, including:

- Employment Preparation Activity (EPA)
- Employability Skills Training (EST)
- Career Transition Assistance (CTA)
- NEIS Training or Exploring Being Your Own Boss workshops
- Skills for Education and Employment (SEE); and
- Adult Migrant English Program.

The Department is closely monitoring participant's engagement, Digital Services Contact Centre Processes and Provider behaviour around the four month activity requirement to help inform the future model.

To try and minimise complexity, processes (such as batching) and model adjustments (such as outcome flexibility and evidence), the NEST will follow jobactive where it is applicable.

## Can I still deliver my Employment Preparation Activities (EPA) in a non face-to-face format?

From 9 March 2021, EPA Providers will need to transition to face-to-face servicing in accordance with the Directions on Return to Face-to-Face Service Delivery.

New EPA courses created within ESS Web must clearly identify they will be delivered face-to-face in the activity title and description. This is to ensure that digital participants are aware of their obligations at the time of booking into EPA Courses via the Activity Search and Booking Functions on their jobactive dashboard.

### 10. Career Transition Assistance (CTA)

From 4 May 2020, CTA funding moved out of the Employment Fund and received separate additional funding of \$41.7 million until 30 June 2022. This will maximise the opportunities for job seekers aged 45 years and over to receive training to enhance their skills and improve their job prospects.

From 9 March 2021, CTA Providers are required to resume face-to-face servicing in accordance with the relevant CTA Deeds and the updated [Directions on the Return to Face-to-Face Servicing](#). Please refer to the 'FAQs – COVID-19 Career Transition Assistance' document on the Provider portal to view CTA Specific FAQs particularly in relation to the transition period.

### 11. Transition to Work

#### Referrals to Transition to Work Providers

Eligible young people are automatically referred to Transition to Work (TtW) on completion of the online JSCI. A small number of young people who have not completed their JSCI may have been batch referred to jobactive providers to help them complete all the steps required to commence in employment services.

Where a young person is identified as eligible for TtW servicing following completion of the JSCI the jobactive Provider **must not** complete the young person's Job Plan, instead they should ensure the young person is referred to a TtW provider. The TtW provider will then complete the young person's Job Plan on commencement in the service.

#### Return to face-to-face servicing and provider servicing requirements

From 9 March 2021 Providers **must** resume face-to-face service delivery where this is required by the Deed and in line with local health authority advice. **All** participants will be required to participate in services and attend appointments face-to-face. Providers must ensure that face-to-face delivery is carried out in a safe manner.

In terms of changes to provider servicing requirements, the new Employer Reporting Line may be used to report TtW participants declining a job offer. The remaining changes, increased job search requirements, stronger contractual action to drive performance and the new activity for job seekers after 6 months, will not apply to TtW.

TtW providers should familiarise themselves with the intent of the changes and consider how they can best deliver on the Government's desire to ensure that young people on their caseloads are helped into opportunities that support the economic recovery, within the TtW service parameters.

For further information, please refer to the [Return to Face-to-Face Service Delivery Provider Factsheet](#), available on the Provider Portal.

## Transition to Work Outcomes

The [COVID-19 – Arrangements for Transition to Work Outcomes](#) document on the provider portal provides information regarding flexibilities with breaks and documentary evidence. The document also contains information regarding the impacts of income support changes on TtW Outcomes.

## Funded places and Outcomes

The review of funded places for the January to March 2021 quarter was finalised in December and took effect from 1 January 2021. Similar to the methodology used in the July and October reviews, the department used an agile approach to estimate future demand for TtW Places.

Outcome Performance Targets (Targets) were frozen over the July to December 2020 period in recognition of the significant impact of COVID-19 on the labour market. For the January to March 2021 quarter a 20 per cent increase in Targets was applied in recognition of an improving economy and labour market, the positive impact of JobMaker Hiring Credit on employment opportunities specifically for young people and the plateauing of the increase in TtW caseloads.

A further increase to Targets, 40 per cent of the gap between the current Targets and the notional value of the Targets if all Places currently allocated were used, is being applied for the April 2021 review.

The incremental realignment of Places with Targets will continue to occur over time and based on labour market conditions.

Since 1 July 2020, the department allocated almost 19,000 additional funded places to ensure TtW Providers are well placed to assist new Participants.

## Transition to Work Reference Documents

TtW Providers should monitor the information published on the Provider Portal for all up to date information and changes to service delivery. In particular the [COVID-19 Resources](#) section on the Provider Portal contains information specific to TtW including:

- [COVID-19 – Arrangements for Transition to Work Outcomes](#)
- [COVID-19 – Transition to Work FAQs](#)
- [Directions on Face-to-Face Service Delivery.](#)
- [Return to Face-to-Face Service Delivery Provider Factsheet](#)

## 12. Regional Employment Trials (RET) program

RET grant recipients can deliver activities for RET projects face-to-face, provided it is:

1. **permitted** by the relevant State or Territory government
2. **in-line with advice** provided by local/state health authorities
3. delivered in a **safe manner** from a work health and safety perspective.

Regardless of whether the RET activity is commencing, resuming, or changing delivery to face-to-face, the RET grant recipient must ensure that the Partnering Provider is informed. The Partnering Provider must have a competent person review the risk assessment previously undertaken for the Activity, and where necessary, the competent person will need to update the risk assessment.

Grant recipients should also consult with the Partnering Provider on changes to the RET activity, including updating Activity schedules. Grant recipients should complete the schedule template to update or create the Activity details and forward to the Department at [RET@dese.gov.au](mailto:RET@dese.gov.au), these details will be updated in ESSWeb by the Department and the Partnering Providers will be notified.

## 13. ParentsNext

ParentsNext Providers should monitor the information published on the Provider Portal for all up to date information for ParentsNext, including the ParentsNext [COVID-19](#) page.

Providers must comply with the [Direction on Return to Face-To-Face Delivery](#) and deliver Services face-to-face where this is required by the Deed, and consistent with relevant health advice. For ParentsNext Providers, this means Providers must return to delivering Initial Interviews face-to-face where local health advice, and the participant's circumstances, allow. Participants are required to meet their normal mutual obligation requirements:

- Attend an Initial Interview (face-to-face) unless there are Exceptional Circumstances.
- Agree a Participation Plan setting out their goals and a compulsory Activity.
- Attend and/or participate in an Activity.

Participants must meet their requirements and may be subject to compliance action where they fail to do so without a valid reason.

### Must all appointments be delivered face-to-face?

Per usual arrangements, Providers should be flexible and work with individual participants when setting subsequent appointments and activities. This includes taking the participant's circumstances and local health advice into consideration when agreeing on the mode of service delivery.

Some participants may be anxious about re-engaging with face-to-face requirements and must be supported appropriately.

## 14. Time to Work Employment Service

Time to Work Employment Service (TWES) Providers can return to face-to-face service delivery provided that it is:

- permitted by the relevant state and territory government and/or prison
- offered to participants to opt into engaging with the Provider and participating in face-to-face services
- is in line with advice provided by local health authorities and is carried out in a safe manner.

## 15. Local Jobs Program (LJP)

LJP Activity Hosts can commence face-to-face activities for LJP projects, provided it is:

- permitted by the relevant State or Territory government
- in-line with advice provided by local/state health authorities
- delivered in a safe manner from a work health and safety perspective.

Partnering Providers should also take into consideration advice for LJP participants relative to their referring program (jobactive, NEST, TtW, ParentsNext).

## 16. Harvest Trail Services and Seasonal Worker Programme

COVID-19 travel restrictions have had an impact on Harvest Trail Services (HTS) and the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) due to Working Holiday visa holders and seasonal workers from Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste not being able to freely enter the country and limitations of movements across some state/territory borders.

On 21 August 2020 the Australian Government announced that Commonwealth, state and territory governments have agreed to arrangements to allow targeted recruitments under the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP). Under these arrangements:

- Implementation protocols have been developed with States and Territories consistent with the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee preconditions for relaxation of international border restrictions and agreed by State and Territory Chief Health Officers.
- Each workplace is required to maintain a COVID-19 management plan approved by the relevant State/Territory government.
- If a worker tests positive to COVID-19, just like other workers they will be required to isolate and follow health directions.

While the arrangements have seen the arrival of more than 600 workers into Australia under the SWP, new employment opportunities in agriculture and horticulture industries continue to arise for local job seekers, particularly for workers displaced due to the impact of COVID-19.

From 1 November 2020, Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job (RATTUAJ) will be available to people who relocate to harvest, regional or remote areas to take up short-term agricultural work, including Australians who are not receiving income support and those with the right to work in Australia. If job seekers need to move away from home to take up short-term agricultural or harvest work for at least six weeks and at least 120 hours duration, financial assistance of up to \$6,000 for Australian workers and \$2,000 for temporary visa holders with general working rights (including working holiday makers and international students) to help cover relocation costs may be available.

Further information is available on <https://jobsearch.gov.au/harvest/workers/relocation-assistance>

All Harvest vacancies are required to be advertised on the Harvest Trail website and recorded in the Departments IT system. The Department strongly encourages jobactive Providers to connect with job seekers and HTS Providers to take up these opportunities.

## Working Holiday Makers

Working holiday makers who are employed in critical sectors including agriculture, health, aged and disability care and childcare continue to be exempt from the six month work limitation with one employer.

Working holiday makers employed in critical sectors who haven't completed the 3 or 6 months of specified work required to apply for a second or third Working Holiday Maker visa, and are unable to leave Australia, may be eligible for a Temporary Activity (subclass 408 Australian Government Endorsed Event (AGEE) stream) visa. This visa will allow working holiday makers to remain lawfully in Australia, and continue working, if they wish to do so, until they can return to their home country.

If contacted by a working holiday maker looking for a job in agriculture, please advise them not to go directly to farms but to contact a Harvest Trail Services (HTS) Provider in their area or the employer listed in the job advertisement.

## Direct registration of Harvest workers who are not on income support

Harvest Trail Services (HTS) Providers can continue to direct register potential harvest workers, who are not on income support, by email or telephone as a result of the Australian Government travel and social distancing COVID-19 requirements. Providers can complete the Direct Registration form over the phone, with the job seeker signing at a later date, or providing a signed copy electronically (by email/text). The Provider must retain this documentation. Direct Registration forms are available online for Australian workers at <https://jobsearch.gov.au/harvest/workers/australian>

In harvest, regional and remote locations, where a Harvest Trail Services Provider is not available to administer Relocation Assistance To Take Up a Job (RATTUAJ) for short-term Agricultural Work, the Harvest Trail Information Service (HTIS) can be contacted for assistance to direct register on 1800 062 332.

## 17. Employability Skills Training (EST)

### Are EST courses returning to face-to-face delivery?

With the return of face-to-face servicing arrangements with effect from 9 March, the Department's expectation is that EST courses will generally be delivered face-to-face, unless COVID-19 related requirements of State or Territory governments restrict the delivery of face-to-face servicing. The [Direction on return to Face-to-Face Service Delivery](#) sets out certain circumstances where courses can be delivered by an alternative method.

Employment services Providers should generally refer job seekers to face-to-face courses where available. However, employment services Providers can continue to refer job seekers to non-face-to-face courses:

- where the EST course has been arranged on or before 23 February 2021 in a non-face-to-face format and is scheduled to commence on or before 30 April 2021,
- where face-to-face service delivery is restricted or prevented by the requirements of a State or Territory government, for the period of the requirements, or

- within four weeks of the revocation date of a State or Territory restriction that entirely prevents face-to-face service delivery.

The Department will be monitoring the creation of non-face-to-face courses by EST Providers to ensure that they meet the appropriate requirements.

## How do I identify the mode of delivery for EST courses?

EST Providers have been instructed to include at the beginning of the **Activity Name** in ESSWeb:

- 'F2F' for face-to-face courses
- 'ONLINE' for all non-face-to-face EST courses regardless of the method of delivery
- 'HYBRID' for courses delivered using both face-to-face and non-face-to-face service delivery.

For non-face-to-face and hybrid courses EST Providers have been asked to ensure that the *Activity Description* field details the mode of delivery (e.g. online, Skype, over the phone, etc.) and any required technology or data. This information enables employment services Providers to choose appropriate EST courses for their young job seekers, taking into account each job seeker's circumstances, capabilities and access to technology.

## What considerations are there when referring job seekers to a non-face-to-face EST course?

For non-face-to-face and hybrid EST courses employment services Providers must consider the circumstances and capabilities of each job seeker, including whether they have access to devices and necessary technology. Employment services Providers should work closely with EST Providers to ensure any alternative service delivery arrangements are appropriate to the individual, and determine if the job seeker requires any support from the Employment Fund. This could include the purchase of a mobile phone for participation over the phone, or assistance with data costs for participation online or by videoconference (e.g. Skype).

## Do job seekers flagged as EST mandatory in the Department's IT Systems need to be referred to EST? (not applicable to NEST)

Yes, job seekers with a mandatory requirement to participate in EST need to be referred to Employability Skills Training, or another suitable activity. If participation in EST is not appropriate for the job seeker, or if a suitable course is not available within the next 8 weeks, then the appropriate opt-out reason should be applied.

## With the introduction of the requirement to undertake an activity after six months in service, do EST Mandatory job seekers still need to be referred to EST at five months? (not applicable to NEST)

Yes, job seekers with a mandatory requirement to participate in EST should be referred to EST or another suitable activity after five months in service. If the job seeker has not participated in EST or another suitable activity by six months in service the job seeker must be referred to EST or another activity to satisfy the six month participation requirement.

If the job seeker has completed their EST course prior to six months in service, there is no requirement to refer the job seeker to another course at six months in service – however the job seeker may choose to undertake the remaining block of EST, and will retain their EST Mandatory status until both blocks of EST have been completed.

## **Will the EST benchmark requirement be relaxed given the impact of COVID-19? (not applicable to NEST)**

It is important that young people have the opportunity to build their employability skills, especially now given the impacts of the pandemic on young people. The Department's expectation is that jobactive Providers should have at least 80 per cent of EST mandatory job seekers referred to, or commenced in, an activity (including EST where appropriate) at all times.

The Department expects performance against the benchmark to have improved throughout performance period 11, particularly in locations where mutual obligation requirements have returned. Any jobactive Providers currently not meeting the benchmark without improved performance can expect a discussion with their Account Manager about the effectiveness of their engagement strategies.

jobactive Providers are reminded that EST is available to all eligible young job seekers from their first day of service – not just those flagged in the Department's IT systems as having a mandatory requirement.

## **Can job seekers be referred to EST courses in another location if the course does not involve face-to-face contact?**

Job seekers can be referred to a course in any part of their employment region, however, please consider the suitability of the EST course and its applicability to the job seeker's local labour market when making referrals.

The Department will only approve referral of job seekers to EST courses outside of their employment region in exceptional circumstances.

## **Can I give EST Providers a job seeker's postal address so that offline resources (e.g. workbooks) can be mailed out?**

Yes, as long as the job seeker has provided consent to disclosure of personal information to third parties, including other Commonwealth Government agencies and their contracted Providers, where those Providers are delivering services to the job seeker.

## **18. Employment Services Providers obligations and responsibilities**

### **What are an Employment Services Providers' obligations to their employees in regard to COVID-19?**

The model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require a person conducting a business or undertaking (in this instance the person responsible for managing the Employment Service Provider)

to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace. This includes providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety and adequate facilities for workers in carrying out their work, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Safe Work Australia have issued advice as to how this should be considered in relation to COVID-19: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-pcbus>

The Safe Work Australia advice includes the following:

- What an employer should do to protect workers and others at a workplace.
- When an employer can direct a worker to stay away from their usual place of work under the model WHS laws.
- What else an employer should take into account when deciding whether a worker, or other people, need to stay away from their usual place of work.
- Must an employer consult with workers about measures they put in place to minimise the risk of COVID-19?
- Do workers, or other people, need to comply with a direction from an employer to stay away from their usual place of work?
- Can a worker refuse to come to work?
- Workers' Compensation and COVID-19.

## **What should an Employment Services Provider do if one of their job seekers/participants or staff report they have a confirmed case of Coronavirus (COVID-19) or a requirement to self-isolate?**

The health and safety of Employment Service Provider staff and job seekers/participants is paramount.

The Provider should immediately advise the individual to:

- immediately self-isolate, if they haven't already, for a period of 14 days
- assess any exposure to site, activity or person the job seeker/participant or staff member may have had and act accordingly in regard to:
- self-isolation for affected staff and other job seekers/participants
- possible site closures/activity cancellations
- report any subsequent site closures to:
  - Their DESE Account and Contract Managers, by email or phone; and/or
  - Advise the Department by emailing [AMSecretariat@dese.gov.au](mailto:AMSecretariat@dese.gov.au)
- reschedule any appointments or activities, including in the IT system, until the job seeker/participant has finished their self-isolation in line with advice from Health Authorities
- assess the possible exposure risk to staff and other job seekers/participants and establish whether any further self-isolations should be put in place
- if the person is a job seeker or a participant they should call, but not attend, Centrelink to seek an exemption from their mutual obligation requirements (if no contingency

arrangements are in place – see Mutual Obligations above). Job seekers and participants can contact Centrelink to discuss an exemption by calling the numbers below:

- JobSeeker Payment and Special Benefit recipients: 132 850
- Youth Allowance recipients: 132 490
- Parenting Payment recipients with mutual obligation requirements: 136 150.
- if the person is a job seeker or participant they should advise Centrelink and the Employment Service Provider:
  - if they are confirmed as having COVID-19 or
  - when they are cleared of having COVID-19.

If a site closure is required the Department understands that Providers may not be in a position to advise the Department until after the site is closed. The Department will work with Providers to action any site closures quickly and flexibly.

### **What action must Employment Service Providers take in regard to job seekers or participants who have - or possibly have - Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection but have not self-isolated?**

In circumstances where you or your staff have information that a job seeker/participant or staff member has recently returned from overseas - or has been in contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 - but has not self-isolated:

- the job seeker/participant or staff member must be directed to not attend the premises, or to leave them if already there, as well as to immediately self-isolate for a period of 14 days
- the job seeker/participant should be advised to call, but not attend, Centrelink to seek an exemption (see above for relevant numbers)
- assess any exposure to site, activity or person the job seeker/participant or staff member may have had and act accordingly in regard to:
  - self-isolation for affected staff and other job seekers/participants
  - possible site closures/activity cancellations
- immediately reschedule any of the job seeker/participants requirements in the IT system to ensure their income support is not impacted as a result of a necessary period of self-isolation.

### **What action will Centrelink take when job seekers and/or participants report self-isolation due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection or possible infection?**

Where a job seeker/participant contacts Centrelink to advise they are in isolation, a Major Personal Crisis exemption may be granted for a period of 14 days.

Supporting evidence will not be required for this initial exemption as long as this falls within the Department of Health advice regarding grounds for self-isolation.

## **What happens if the job seeker/participant is unable to return after the granted Major Personal Crisis Exemption period?**

If the job seeker/participant is required to remain in isolation beyond exemption period granted by Centrelink, then they will need to make phone contact with their Provider and with Centrelink again.

To ensure their income support is not impacted as a result of a continued period of self-isolation, any of the job seeker/participants requirements must be rescheduled in the IT system.

## **What do we do if we are no longer operating out of our tendered or pre-COVID-19 Full Time/Part Time/Outreach sites or locations?**

Providers can request the Department via their Account Managers to vary their current site arrangements at any time.

## **Can we have the Department's modelling on expected unemployment levels?**

Please refer to the Australian Government Treasury website, which provides modelling on the expected unemployment rate.

The Department is working closely with Treasury and other agencies to monitor developments in the labour market.

## **Can the Department provide jobactive placement trends?**

Providers are able to use the Qlik App called League Table Outcomes (jPERF04) to review placement trends for their own organisation, and de-identified data for other Providers.